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THE
GHOST STORY

By
BOOTH
TARKINGTON



STEWART KIDD

LITTLE THEATRE PLAYS

Edited by
GRACE ADAMS

Stewart Kidd Little Theatre Plays

Edited by GRACE ADAMS

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STEWART KIDD LITTLE THEATRE PLAYS

Edited by Grace Adams

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THE GHOST STORY



THE GHOST STORY

*A One-Act Play for Persons of
No Great Age*

By
BOOTH TARKINGTON



CINCINNATI
STEWART KIDD COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

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THE PERSONS

GEORGE, *an earnest young gentleman of 22.*

ANNA, *a pretty, young girl of 20.*

MARY

GRACE

LENNIE

TOM

FLOYD

LYNN

FRED

HOUSEMAID.

Three girls of 19 or 20.

Four youths of about the same.

NOTE.—Upon the program it should be mentioned that the curtain will be lowered for a moment during the progress of the play to denote a lapse of about half an hour.

THE GHOST STORY

The rise of the curtain discloses a comfortable and pleasant living-room of commonplace type. It is early evening; a clock on the mantelpiece marks the time as twenty minutes after seven; the lamps are lit. At a piano is seated a pretty girl of twenty; she plays dance music gayly for a few moments; then abruptly her theme becomes sentimental and she plays a love song, singing bits of it to herself, while her expression becomes tender and wistful.

An electric bell is heard, and upon this sound she stops singing and playing at once; her look is alert. She considers the room thoughtfully, then goes to a chair beside a little table, picks up a small leather-bound book, sits and pretends to read with dreamy absorption. Then, behind her, across the room, a door is opened, offering a glimpse of a hallway, where a nervous and earnest young gentleman of twenty-two is hastily concluding the removal of his heavy overcoat and gloves, with the connivance of a housemaid. He comes into the living-room immediately. With an air of complete surprise the girl looks up from her pretended reading.

THE GIRL

Why, George— (She rises.)

GEORGE (as the housemaid closes the door)

Anna, I came early because—

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ANNA (*as they shake hands and sit*)

I'm so flattered. I didn't dream you'd do more than just call me up to say good-by.

GEORGE

You didn't think I'd come myself?

ANNA

Why, no. I didn't think you'd have time; you have to make good-by calls on all your aunts and married sisters and cousins, don't you? I'm really very much flattered.

GEORGE

I came early, as soon as I could choke down dinner and run, because—well, I wanted to talk to you alone for a few minutes for a novelty. I thought maybe just this once I could get here before the rest of 'em pile in.

ANNA

"The rest of 'em?" I don't *know* that any of 'em will "pile in" this evening, George.

GEORGE

No, you never do; but they pile in, just the same. That's the trouble with you, Anna; you're too popular. (*She laughs protestingly. He goes on earnestly.*) Oh, yes, you are. It's horrible!

ANNA

What nonsense!

GEORGE

It's the truth; it's just horrible for a girl to be like you.

ANNA

Thanks!

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GEORGE (*emphatically*)

It is. Nobody can ever get within a mile of you. And what I hate about it is that girls hang around you just as much as the rest of us do.

ANNA (*demurely*)

You think it's queer that girls like me, George?

GEORGE

It isn't "queer," no. (*Adds in a burst of confidence.*) But it's been pretty painful to me these holidays.

ANNA (*staring*)

What *are* you talking about?

GEORGE

Well, that's what I came early to tell you.

ANNA

You came early to tell me what you're talking about?

GEORGE (*a little confused*)

What I mean to say—listen; it's just this:
I—I—I—

ANNA (*reminding him*)

You began by saying it's horrible that anybody seems able to stand me.

GEORGE

It's horrible that I always have to see you in a crowd; that's what I mean. If there aren't four or five men around you, then there are four or five girls; and if there aren't just four or five girls, or four or five men, then there are four or five of both of 'em!

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ANNA

But look, George. Look under the piano, and under the chairs, and under—

GEORGE

What for?

ANNA

For all those people you said were always around me. It's queer, but you do seem to me to be the only one here.

GEORGE

Yes, just this minute. But you know as well as I do that pretty soon the bell will begin ringing, and they'll come pouring in. Then when they're here they stay and stay and stay and— Why, it *is* horrible!

ANNA

Aren't you a funny boy!

GEORGE

I wish I could see any fun in it! (*He rises and paces the floor as he talks.*) Why, I believe if I'd known it was going to be like this I wouldn't have come home for the holidays. You don't know how I looked forward to coming home and—and seeing you! Why, I've hardly thought of anything else, all the fall term!

ANNA (*incredulously*)

You don't mean you thought of it during the football season?

GEORGE

No. I mean yes. Yes, I was looking forward to it even then, too. I kept thinking: "Just wait till the Christmas holidays come; then I'll get to see a whole lot of Anna. I'll get to

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dance with her a lot, to take her to a lot of things—maybe, even, I'll get some evenings alone with her by the fire, and we'll read some poetry or something together." That's what I thought! (*He laughs bitterly.*) And look what's happened! You were booked up *solid* for every last little thing a person could hope to take you to! I've never got once clear around with you a single time you've danced with me—some frenzied bird always cut in—and every afternoon or evening I've found you at home I've had to sit about seventeen rows back and just be audience for the bickering that went on. And now it's my last evening; my train leaves at nine-fifty-one, and I won't see you again till June, after commencement; and I know I'm not going to get a chance to talk to you five minutes! Some of these birds'll be breaking in here any second. That's why it's horrible!

ANNA

But they haven't broken in yet, George.

GEORGE

Yes, but they will!

ANNA (*shyly*)

Well, but if you—if you *do* like being alone with me, why don't you—well, why don't you just like it until they do come?

GEORGE

"Like it?" You don't seem to realize my train is the nine-fifty-one, and I'll have to leave here at least half an hour before then; and I'll have

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to say good-by to you with people around, so I *can't* say what I want to!

ANNA

But what is it you want to say to me—except just good-by?

GEORGE

Well, it's something I couldn't say with people around.

ANNA (*nervously*)

But—but there aren't any people around now, George.

GEORGE (*shaking his head gloomily*)

Oh, there would be, before I could say it! I know 'em!

ANNA (*noncommittal*)

Well—

GEORGE (*taking a chair near her suddenly*)

Anna, it's just this. I want you to understand the position I'm in. I want you to understand what I—what I have in mind. (*Breaks off abruptly in a tone of abysmal despair.*) But what's the use? Some of 'em are *sure* to come in. Couldn't you send word you're not at home?

ANNA

Well, you see, Lennie Cole and Tom Bannister and Mary and Grace and Fred—

GEORGE

I knew it! And you said you didn't know they'd be piling in!

ANNA

I don't—not precisely, that is. But—but, of course it's possible. And they'd certainly

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know it wasn't so if I sent word "not at home," and they'd feel hurt.

GEORGE (*despairingly*)

That's it! That's my regular luck with you!

Isn't there *any* way to get rid of 'em?

ANNA (*seemingly reproachful*)

They *are* friends of mine, you know, George.

GEORGE (*despondently*)

Pardon me.

ANNA

Very well.

GEORGE

Listen. What I was saying—

ANNA (*quickly*)

Yes, George?

GEORGE (*speaking hurriedly*)

I wanted to tell you, I have been looking forward to the holidays because I thought this would be the time I'd be—ah—justified, as it were, in saying something I—something I had in mind to say to you.

ANNA

Yes, George?

GEORGE

I've had it in my mind to say ever since—well, for quite a time—ever since—ever since—

ANNA

Is it something about your studies, George?

GEORGE (*emphatically*)

No, it certainly isn't. It's about—well, I've wanted to say it—ah—a long time.

ANNA

How long?

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GEORGE

Ever since—well, it was that day you wore a blue dress.

ANNA

What sort of a blue dress?

GEORGE

I don't know. It was—it was blue.

ANNA

With flounces? And lace on the blouse?

GEORGE

I don't know. It was just—sort of blue.

ANNA

But I haven't had a blue dress this year.

GEORGE

No. It wasn't this year.

ANNA

Why, the last time I wore a blue dress was that summer at the lake, three years ago.

GEORGE

Yes. That was when it was. You wore it the day we went canoeing for water lilies. That was the day it happened.

ANNA

The day what happened?

GEORGE

The day you wore the blue dress.

ANNA

Oh, yes.

GEORGE

Yes. It was then.

(Both of them are very serious.)

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ANNA

Yes. That one was blue linen, and very simple. It was another one that had flounces—with lace on the blouse.

GEORGE (HESITATINGLY)

Well—ever since then I've thought that some day I might feel that I was in a—well, in a position to—to justify—ah—what I'd like to say. You see, I—well, I was pretty young then; we both were, in fact.

ANNA

Yes, I suppose we were.

GEORGE

Yes. I suppose I hardly realized how young I was at the time. Funny, isn't it? I thought I was a real grown-up man of the world, and I was only nineteen! Looking back on it over these years a person sees how much he had still to learn! My goodness! When I think of all I've been through since then—

ANNA

You mean at college?

GEORGE

Yes, and here at home, too—like what I've been through these holidays, for instance.

ANNA

Have you? Why, I thought you looked so well, George.

GEORGE

I mean not getting near you. You know. What I was talking about.

ANNA

But that couldn't be very severe, George.

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GEORGE

Yes, it could, because it was! Anna, my father stopped off a day to see me at college in October—

ANNA

(INTERESTEDLY)

How nice!

GEORGE

We had a pretty serious talk about my future.

ANNA

(SYMPATHETICALLY)

Oh, I'm sorry it was serious, George.

GEORGE

What I mean—it was business-like. About my future in business.

ANNA (*somewhat vaguely*)

Oh, yes.

GEORGE

Next June, when I get home, he's going to take me right in with him. He thinks—well, he thinks I'll get along all right. He—he's going to give me a ten-per-cent interest in the business, Anna.

ANNA

(MEANINGFULLY)

How lovely!

GEORGE (*swallowing*)

So that's—that's why I said I feel—ah—justified—in saying what I want to get a chance to—to say to you, Anna.

ANNA

Yes, George?

GEORGE

What I mean—I mean that's why I'm sure to have sufficient means to—to settle down, as it were—and so I—I thought—I—

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ANNA

Yes, George?

GEORGE

You see, that day you wore the blue dress I was only nineteen, and I hadn't had this talk with my father, because, in fact, I never did have this talk with him until just this October—as it were—and so—and so—

ANNA

Yes, George?

GEORGE (*solemn but increasingly nervous*)

And so—well, the time has come—the time has come—

ANNA (*glancing over her shoulder at the hall door*)

The time has come? Yes, George?

GEORGE

The time has come when I—when I want to ask you if—if—if—the time has come—it's come—it's come—

ANNA

Yes, George?

(*The bell rings loudly.*)

GEORGE (*leaping to his feet*)

I knew it! I knew they'd come piling in here just the instant I— (*He turns up-stage, clasping his brow.*) Oh, my heavens! I knew it!

ANNA

Oh!

(*The door into the hall is opened by the housemaid, and two girls of nineteen or twenty are revealed, divesting themselves of outer wraps. They*

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at once come hurrying gayly down to Anna, greeting her with a jumble of words and laughter, to which she contributes in like manner, as they exclaim: "We just thought we'd frolic over to see you, old thing," and "Nothing doing at our house, so we thought we'd see if you knew anything." Anna responds simultaneously, "Just lovely of you! We were just hoping you'd take it into your heads to drop in. How nice of you!" and so forth. The newcomers greet George with "Hello, George.")

GEORGE (*responds pessimistically*)

Howdy-do, Mary. Howdy-do, Grace.

ANNA

George just dropped in to say good-by.

MARY

Gracious! Hope we're not interfering.

GEORGE (*feebly*) (*SAME AS MARY*)

Oh, no. Not at all!

ANNA (*laughing*)

Why, of course not!

(*The bell rings.*)

GEORGE

Oh, my goodness! Here's some more!

GRACE (*reproachfully*)

College English, George? Don't they teach you to say "Here are more"?

GEORGE (*with gloomy absent-mindedness*)

Yes, there certainly are! I knew it!

(*The hall door opens to admit five more lively young people: a girl and four youths. The girl's*

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name—it appears during the ensuing greetings—is LENNIE, and the young gentlemen are known to those present as TOM, FLOYD, LYNN, and FRED. They chatter phrases and half sentences of greeting all together for a few moments, though George takes only a pessimistic and fragmentary part in the ceremonies; then Lennie shouts louder than any of the others and obtains a hearing.)

LENNIE

But what are we going to do? We aren't just going to sit around and talk, are we?

MARY

Let's all go somewhere.

SEVERAL OF THE OTHERS

Well, where? Where is there to go? Where do you want to go?

LENNIE

Well, most anywhere.

GEORGE

(BRIGHTLY)
That's a sensible idea.

MARY

Where do you say to go, Anna?

ANNA

I? Oh, nowhere. I thought I wouldn't go out to-night.

GRACE

All right, then; we'll stay here!

CHORUS

Well, why not? Might as well be here as anywhere. Yes, let's take it easy for one night. *(And so forth.)*

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LENNIE

Well, what's the matter with our shaking the hoof a while? Turn on that phonograph, somebody. (*She grasps the youth Floyd.*)

CHORUS (STRONG) (ACCENTED)

That's it! Come on, then! We can dance here's well's anywhere! Tune her up, George!

(*They prepare to dance; Anna is seized upon, and, in the pairing of couples, the gloomy George finds himself the odd person, excluded.*)

CHORUS

Start the instrument, George! George, you're the band! Why don't you tune up, George?

(*George starts the phonograph, which stands in a corner of the room. The others dance, chattering. George goes to the fireplace and compares his watch with the clock on the mantel shelf. Then he produces a camper's pocketknife, opens out of it a small screwdriver, and returns to the phonograph with an air of determination. Glancing over his shoulder and assuring himself that the dancers are too busy to observe him, he busily sets to work upon the mechanism of the phonograph. Meanwhile the others begin to sing loudly and gayly the air played by the record, all oblivious of George's energetic destructiveness. The record falters; then it begins to make peculiar sounds.*)

CHORUS (*not pausing in the dance*)

Why, gracious! What's the matter with the music? Is that instrument sick? Sounds like cholera morbus! (*And so forth.*)

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FLOYD (*shouting*)

Put on another record, George. What's the matter with the thing, anyhow?

GEORGE (*moving hastily away from the phonograph*)

I don't know. Is something wrong?

CHORUS

Can't you fix it? Put on another record! Do something!

GEORGE

Well, I'll see. (*He puts a hand under the lid of the phonograph; there is instantly a clatter, and the music stops. So do the dancers.*)

CHORUS

What is the matter? Why don't you fix it? Why don't you—

GEORGE

Something seems to be the matter with it!

GRACE

Well, hurry and fix-it.

GEORGE

I don't believe I—

LYNN (*looking under the lid*)

Well, no; I don't believe you could! (*He takes from under the lid the metal arm and detached sound box of the instrument.*) Why, it would take Edison himself to put this phonograph together again—it's all fallen apart!

CHORUS

Goodness! Why, just look at it! Well, of all the disappointing— Oh, my, how silly of it! (*And so forth.*)

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TOM

That's all the dancing you'll do to-night,
ladies!

MARY

But you're ~~men~~. Why don't some of you
fix it?

LYNN (*singing*)

*Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall—*

GRACE

Oh, do hush. Why don't you fix it?

FLOYD and LYNN (*singing together*)

*All the king's horses and all the king's men
Couldn't put Humpty together again!*

*(They execute a few clog steps by way of con-
clusion.)*

MARY (*sinking into a chair*)

How tiresome!

FLOYD and LYNN (*CIRCUITOUSLY*)

Thanks, lady!

GRACE (*sitting*)

Well, what are we going to do?

FRED (*BRIGHTLY [excitedly]*)

Let's play Button, Button! Who's Got the
Button?

LENNIE (*sitting*)

Do hush!

GEORGE (*earnestly*)

Well, I can't think of any way you could amuse
yourselves. Strikes me this would be a great
night for everybody to go home and get some
sleep.

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TOM

I thought you had to start back to college tonight.

GEORGE

I do. I meant everybody else.

TOM

What's the matter with you, George? I mean with your mind.

GEORGE

Nothing. I only meant—

GRACE

Oh, do hush! Can't anybody think of something we could do?

GEORGE

No. Not a thing.

MARY

We could play charades.

GEORGE

Charades? They're terrible.

GRACE (*with a shrug*)

Well, let's just sit around and talk, then.

GEORGE

Oh, murder, no!

ANNA

Well, what do you want to do, George?

GEORGE (*hastily*)

Well, I want to— (*He checks himself.*) I was just trying to think. It does seem a great night to go home and sleep.

FLOYD (*finishing a consultation with Fred*)

Why, of course. We've got enough for two tables, with George left over. He has to go pretty soon, anyhow, so he needn't play.

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GEORGE (*uneasily*)

I needn't play what?

FLOYD (*smilingly*)

Bridge. We've got just enough for two tables without you.

CHORUS

That's it! Of course! Bridge! We'll play bridge till midnight. That's splendid! (*And so forth.*)

(*As they chatter they begin to clear two tables for cards.*)

GEORGE

No! For heaven's sake—

CHORUS

Anna, where are the cards? Get some counters and pencils. Who's going to be my partner? Who's going to be mine?

GEORGE (*shouting*)

No! Stop it! My goodness! Don't you ever get tired of doing the same thing night after night? Just because you can't dance you don't have to play bridge, do you? Stop it! (*He is so vehement that he commands their attention; they pause in arrested attitudes.*)

FLOYD

Well, what's your idea? What do you think we'll like better?

GEORGE (*desperately*)

Well, let's—let's—let's—I'll tell you what let's do: let's tell ghost stories.

THE GHOST STORY

CHORUS (*dismally*)

Oh, my! Why, how silly! Of all the foolish—
(*And so forth.*)

(*They turn to the tables again.*)

GEORGE

Wait! I'll tell you a ghost story. I'll show you if it's silly or not! I'll tell you a ghost story that the first time it was told in college everybody got so nervous that—well, some of 'em couldn't stand it.

FRED

What did they do?

GEORGE

Well, they—they got so nervous they—they—

FLOYD (*skeptically*)

Had to go right home to bed, did they?

GEORGE

Well, never mind. Let's see what you do.

MARY

I'd like to hear the ghost story that would make me nervous!

ANNA

Let's see if he can. Shall we all sit down, George?

GEORGE

Yes; all of you please sit down. (*They take chairs, smiling to one another and whispering skeptically as he goes on.*) And we don't want so much light; just this lamp'll do. I'll make it dimmer. (*He ties his handkerchief about the bulb of a lamp on a table.*) The way to feel a story like this is to think about it almost in

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the dark. (*He shuts off the other lights at a switch upon the wall, leaving only the vague illumination of the dimmed lamp on the table.*)

CHORUS (*incredulous, satirical, and giggling*)

Goodness, ain't it creepy! Why, George, how can you be so dramatic? How turrabill! Oh, Georgie, Georgie! (*And so forth.*)

GEORGE (*assuming a husky voice*)

Listen, I tell you. (*He stands by the dimmed lamp so that his face is vaguely seen above the triangular patch of light made by the lamp shade.*)

FLOYD

Well, go on. We're listening.

GEORGE (*impressively husky*)

This is a true story. It happened in a house a little way out in the country from Wilmington, Delaware.

A SATIRIC VOICE

Wilmington, Delaware? My goodness, how fearful! Delaware!

ANOTHER VOICE

Give the poor thing a chance.

GEORGE

It was just fourteen years ago this winter, and the facts are known by pretty near everybody in Wilmington. If you ask almost anybody from Wilmington about it he'll tell you it's so. Well, this house was an old frame house; it was long and—and—

A VOICE

Rambling. Long and rambling, George.

GEORGE

Yes, it is; it's long and rambling. That is, it

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was; because after what I'm going to tell you happened to it, why, it had to be torn down. Of course after that nobody would live in it. But fourteen years ago an old man lived there; he lived there all alone. After dark nobody ever saw a light in that house, and—and nobody knew anything about the old man except that he used to kill any cat that happened to come in his yard. The neighbors watched one night, and they heard a cat meowing under a bush, and they saw the dim figure of this old man creeping and creeping toward the bush. Then they heard the cat give a kind of terrible scream, and they saw the old man capering around and wringing this cat's neck—just like a chicken's neck! Now, this old man—

A GIRL'S VOICE (*impressed*)

It *is* fairly creepy.

A YOUNG MAN'S VOICE (*also rather impressed*)

Well, go on, George.

GEORGE

This old man never went out in the daytime. No one ever saw just what he looked like, except that he had long, scraggly white hair, and his complexion was a horrible kind of fishy-white color. But night after night the neighbors would see him prowling among the bushes and underbrush in the big weedy yard—and then they'd hear something give a kind of strangling scream, and he'd be wringing something's neck like a chicken, in the dark. And they kept wondering and wondering, and so one night—one night when everybody was

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asleep and the wind was moaning and the sky was covered with a thunder cloud—

(At this point, while George talks, the curtain descends for a moment to indicate the lapse of about half an hour, during which George is telling the greater part of his story. Upon the curtain's rising again he is discovered to be continuing, speaking more dramatically as he warms toward his climax.)

GEORGE

The rapping on the wall was always the same. Three times. Just like this. *(He raps upon the table.)* Three times. Like this. Always just three times. Like this.

A GIRL'S VOICE *(nervously)*

See here! I'm beginning not to like this a little bit!

GEORGE

Listen, will you? Can't you listen?

A YOUTH'S VOICE:

We are listening!

A GIRL'S VOICE *(at the same time)*

Go on; we're listening.

ANOTHER VOICE

What's the matter with you?

TWO OTHER VOICES

Why don't you go ahead?

GEORGE

Then listen! On the thirteenth of March, exactly thirteen years after the night the old man was killed, some workmen were making re-

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pairs to the plumbing in that rickety old house where he died. Now, these workmen—

A GIRL'S VOICE (*interrupting nervously*)

George, did you say these workmen were plumbers?

GEORGE (*rather crossly*)

Yes, they were.

A YOUTH'S VOICE

Why, they had to be plumbers, didn't they? He said they were doing something to the plumbing. How could they help being plumbers if they were there on account of the plumbing?

ANOTHER VOICE (*impatiently*)

Well, who said they weren't? Go ahead.

GEORGE (*rather annoyed*)

It was an old plumber and a young plumber.

ANOTHER VOICE

Just two of 'em?

GEORGE

Listen! These two plumbers were in the old house all alone—all alone in that empty old house where the murder—

A GIRL'S VOICE (*again interrupting nervously*)

But if there were two of 'em how could either of 'em have been all alone? I don't—

GEORGE (*impatiently*)

Listen, will you? These two men were working at the bathtub where the old man's body—I mean his remains—where his remains had been found thirteen years before, on the thirteenth of March, the same night of the month that they were working there now. The only light these two plumbers had was the light of a

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lantern, and all the rest of the big old house was pitch dark. Then all at once these two plumbers heard something they thought was a drop of water—just one drop of water that seemed to drip from somewhere. But it had a queer sort of sound, and they didn't like it. "What was that?" the younger one asked the older one. "It sounded like a drop of water falling—from somewhere. I guess it was water," he said. Well, the older one looked around, but he couldn't see anything. "I guess it's probably only a leak in the roof, maybe, and a drop of rain came through." "Well, but how could that be?" the other one said. "There hasn't been any rain for a month." Then, just as they were talking, they heard another drop fall, and they didn't see where it lit. Then another drop fell, and it made a kind of little sizzling sound. "What makes it sound like that?" the younger one wanted to know; but the older one said he couldn't think what did. Then there was another drop—and another—and another—and all at once the old workman said, "Look, here! What makes our light so red?" Well, the young one jumped right up. "By George! I was just noticing that!" he said. "Our light has been getting red!" And so, just that second another drop fell, and made the sort of sizzling sound they'd noticed—and both of 'em jumped round and looked at the lantern, because the sound came from there. "My goodness!" the younger one said. "Look at that lantern chimney!" The drops were

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falling on the hot lantern chimney; that's what made the sizzling sound. And what made the light red was the color of the drops that were falling on it. The lantern chimney was all red with what had been falling on it!

A GIRL'S VOICE (*protesting nervously*)
Say!

A YOUTH'S VOICE
Hush up! Go on with the story.

ANOTHER GIRL'S VOICE
This is just awful. I wish you'd turn up the light.

ANOTHER YOUTH'S VOICE
Go on, George.

GEORGE
Then, just as another drop fell on the lamp chimney, the two plumbers heard a louder sound, and it made the flesh creep on their spines, because it sounded like a long, strangling kind of a wail, and it seemed to come right from the floor—the very floor they were standing on; it came from right under their feet—

ANNA'S VOICE (*protesting*)
I can't stand this! Honestly, I can't!

A YOUTH'S VOICE
Don't be so silly, Anna. You know it's only a story.

ANNA
I don't care! It's too awful. I wish George'd stop!

GEORGE
Listen! "What on earth is that?" one of the

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plumbers said. "I never heard any such sound as that from a human voice!"

ANNA (*pleading nervously*)

Please stop, George.

GEORGE

And then the red drops on the lantern chimney trickled so fast they got to be almost a little stream, so the red light got dimmer and dimmer, and then, right underneath them, down in the floor, they heard that long, strangling kind of a wail again. "Oo-oo-oo-oo-ow!" it said. "Oo-oo-oo-ow-ow-ow—"

ANNA (*uttering a kind of a wail herself in her extreme nervousness, so that the two sounds mingle*)

Oh-oo-oo-oo—

ANOTHER GIRL'S VOICE

My goodness! What is that?

A YOUTH'S VOICE (*alarmed*)

See here! Who's doing that?

GEORGE

This wailing went on: "Oo-oo-oo-oo—"

ANNA (*screaming, not loudly, but with convincing sincerity*)

Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh! (*She continues.*)

ANOTHER GIRL'S VOICE (*excitedly*)

What is all this?

A YOUTH'S VOICE

See here! Who is doing that?

(*Others exclaim: "My goodness!" "What's the trouble here?" and "Let's cut this out!" There are sounds of confusion, chairs are overturned, Anna continues to vociferate, "Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh!"*)

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GEORGE (*determined to reach his climax, and making himself heard in spite of everything*)

"I'll find out who's doing this wailing," the old plumber said. "It sounds to me like a cat!" And he took his ax and struck right into the floor. That brought the most awful scream—

(It brings subdued screams also from Anna and Lennie. Everyone talks at once.)

FLOYD (*commandingly*)

Stop it, George! Turn up that light! Anna's got hysterics!

GEORGE (*shouting*)

I got to finish my story, haven't I?

ANOTHER VOICE

Turn up some lights, will you?

(A key button is pressed and the stage is alight, revealing a confused group, with the girls gathered anxiously about Anna. She is in a chair near the center and continues to be rather vociferously agitated.)

ANNA

Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh! (*She goes on.*)

GRACE

Where's some ammonia! Who's got any ammonia?

FRED (*rushing in from another room with a glass of water*)

Here! Dab this on her face!

LENNIE

Rub her hands! Rub her, Floyd!

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(They dab water upon her face with handkerchiefs, while Floyd and Lynn obediently rub her hands.)

ANNA *(protesting, but continuing to be hysterical)*
Don't! Don't splatter me! How could he do it with an ax, George? What do you mean, an ax—

GEORGE
I said—

ANNA *(wildly)*
You said the plumber hit the floor with an ax! Where would a plumber get an ax? Plumbers don't have axes!

GEORGE
Well, this one did!

ANNA
Then he couldn't have been a plumber! *(Mary presses a wet handkerchief upon her lips; Anna struggles.)* Stop it, Mary! Don't put that handkerchief in my mouth!

MARY
Yes, dear; it'll do you good.

ANNA
It won't! Let go my hands!

GRACE
No. Keep on rubbing 'em!

(They do.)

ANNA
I never saw a plumber with an ax. Oh! Oh!
Oh!

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LENNIE (*sternly*)

Hush! Hush! You must hush!

ANNA

Oh! Oh! Oh!

MARY

We'd better call her mother.

ANNA (*sharply*)

Don't you dare!

GRACE

Well, what are we going to do about her?

ANNA

I'll be all right. Just let me alone. Oh! Oh!
Oh!

GEORGE

That's it. We ought to let her alone. We ought to go home and give her a chance to quiet down. She never will if we all stay here and keep her excited like this.

LENNIE

Well, some of us ought to stay. The rest of you go, and I'll stay with her.

GEORGE

No. You go with the rest, and I'll stay till she gets quiet.

LENNIE

How! Why, you're the one that gave her hysterics!

GEORGE (*earnestly*)

Then I ought to be the one to cure her.

ANNA

I'm—Oh! Oh! I'll be all right if you'll just leave me to myself.

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MARY (*nervously*)

Let's do go! This room gives me the creeps after—

CHORUS

Let's go! Anna wants us to. We'd better let her alone a while. She says so herself. Come on!

GEORGE

I'll stay and—

LENNIE and MARY and GRACE

No, you won't!

GEORGE

But I—

LENNIE

Why, the very sight of your face'd make her worse! You march out of here!

CHORUS (*moving toward the hall door and carrying George with them*)

You'll be all right pretty soon, Anna. We'd better do as she says. She'll be all right.

MARY (*returning to Anna*)

You're sure you don't want—

ANNA

No, no, no! I'll be all right just as soon as I can be a little quiet by myself. I really will. Good night, dear!

CHORUS

Good night! Good night, Anna! See you tomorrow, Anna! It's a shame George didn't have more sense! George never did have a grain of intelligence! Good night! Good night!

GEORGE (*turning back*)

Anna, I'll—

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MARY and LENNIE

No, you won't. Let her alone.

(They seize his arms and propel him out into the hall. The door is closed, leaving Anna alone. It is immediately opened again by George, returning.)

GEORGE

Anna, I want to say—

(Lennie, Grace, Mary, Fred, Tom, Floyd, and Lynn instantly seize him and carry him back into the hall.)

CHORUS

You come back here! Haven't you got any sense? George, you ought to be hanged! Bring him along, the idiot!

(They again close the door, and for some moments, as they put on their outer wraps, the sound of their voices in extremely unfavorable comment upon George continues to be heard. Then the talk grows fainter as they move away in the hall. The outer door is heard to close, and there is silence. Anna at once rises calmly, her agitation entirely vanished. She goes to the hall door, looks out, then closes the door and goes thoughtfully to the fire. She seems to wait. Then, as though abandoning an idea, she shrugs her shoulders.)

ANNA

Oh, well!

(Humming a tune, she goes to the piano. But she does not sit. Standing, she touches a chord

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thoughtfully; then shrugs her shoulders again, goes to a table, picks up the leather-bound book she had pretended to read at the opening of the play and, sighing, walks gloomily to the door and opens it, about to leave the room. However, she pauses, listening. A sound has reached her ears from a window across the room. The curtains are drawn, but there is a tapping upon the window pane. The taps come in sets of three, well defined. She smiles suddenly, a very bright smile.)

ANNA

Oh, it's a ghost. (*She becomes serious and returns into the room.*) Is it the ghost of the old cat murderer? (*The tappings continue steadily. She goes to the window, pulls back the curtains, and reveals a frosty glass, behind which is a masculine figure. She interrogates it.*) Is it the ghost?

(The tappings become more emphatic; she opens the window, and George is seen, light snow on his hat and shoulders.)

GEORGE (*huskily*)

Anna—

ANNA

Yes, George?

GEORGE

Are you better?

ANNA

Yes, George.

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GEORGE

I sneaked away from 'em. I thought it might be best to keep away from the front door if any of 'em were looking. Besides, I was afraid they might follow me back. Can I come in?

ANNA

Yes, George.

(He shakes off the snow and climbs in.)

GEORGE

Why, you look all right. Are you?

ANNA (*gently*)

Yes, George.

GEORGE

I just had to tell you; I never dreamed of frightening you. I thought—well, what I thought was maybe I could make that story so awful they'd get scared and go home. But I see I was wrong; the more scared they'd get, why, the less they'd want to leave. I was doing exactly the wrong thing to make 'em go!

ANNA (*smiling*)

Yes, George.

GEORGE

And the only one I really frightened was you! That is, unless—unless—well, I wondered—You see, I know the tones of your voice pretty well—and—and—

ANNA

Yes, George?

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GEORGE

I wondered—Anna, did you pretend to be scared hysterical?

ANNA (*laughing faintly*)

Yes, George.

GEORGE

And that's why they went! Anna, did you want 'em to go?

ANNA (*looking away*)

Yes, George.

GEORGE (*looking at his watch and the clock*)

I've only got—Anna, I've only got about (*he swallows*)—well, it's a pretty short time. Can I—

ANNA

Yes, George. *Swor-*

(*She sits.*)

GEORGE (*taking off his overcoat*) *Swor-*

Thanks! (*He puts the coat and his hat on a chair.*) Anna, I—well, there's something I wanted to say to you. I've wanted to say it ever since the day you wore a blue dress. This thing I want to say to you—well, I'm afraid you'll be surprised when I tell you what it is—

ANNA (*biting her lip*)

Yes, George?

GEORGE (*with increasing nervousness*)

Yes, I'm afraid you will. And I'm—well, I'm terribly afraid you—I'm afraid you won't like it. Of course I—I know I'm not worthy to say it to you, and if you don't like it—and I'm almost sure you won't—well, if you don't, I—

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(*he swallows again*)—I'll just have to stand it somehow, I guess! Well (*he looks at the clock*)—I've hardly got time to say it—

ANNA (*frowning*)

Yes, George?

GEORGE

I don't know what you'll say!

ANNA

Yes, George?

(*His attention seems to be caught uneasily.*)

GEORGE

Anna, what's the matter? You just say the same thing over and over.

ANNA

Yes, George.

GEORGE (*bewildered*)

I don't understand. You see I came here to-night—to—to—to say to you that I—to ask you—to ask you—

ANNA

Yes, George?

GEORGE

I—I—I told you about what my father said to me—how I'd have a share in the business after commencement. So I felt justified in—in—in—

ANNA (*with some emphasis*)

Yes, George?

GEORGE

And so I—I—I want to ask you—to ask—to ask you—

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ANNA (*whispering it shyly*)

Yes, George?

GEORGE (*swallowing*)

To ask you—could you—could you—Anna, could you, could you— (*He approaches her, his voice growing louder in his nervousness.*) Anna, could you, could you—could you—

(*At this instant the heads of Lennie, Mary, Grace, Floyd, Tom, Lynn, and Fred, who have been crouching outside below the sill, suddenly appear in the window.*)

LENNIE, MARY, GRACE, FLOYD, TOM, LYNN, and
FRED (*all together*)

Yes, George!

(*Anna rushes upon the window, closes it, and pulls the curtains across it.*)

GEORGE (*astounded*)

Why, what do they mean? They don't mean I—
—they don't mean you—

(*Anna forms the words "Yes, George" with her lips, then looks shyly down.*)

GEORGE

Oh! (*He swallows.*) Oh!

(*His expression, which has been one of great anxiety, alters to a widening smile as the curtain falls.*)



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